

The Effect of Perceived Service Quality on Brand Loyalty: The Case of 5 Star Hotels in Tourism Sector

Algılanan Hizmet Kalitesinin Marka Sadakati Üzerine Etkisi: Turizm Sektörü 5 Yıldızlı Oteller Örneği

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Perceived Service Quality,
Brand Loyalty,
Tourism Industry,
5-Star Hotels,
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Jel Codes:

L15, M31, M30, M00

This study aims to examine the attitudes towards brand loyalty based on the perceived service quality of guests staying in 5-star hotels in the tourism sector. The sample consists of 204 male and female participants who stayed in a 5-star hotel in Istanbul. The study evaluates how the dimensions of perceived service quality-namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy-affect brand loyalty among hotel guests. Quantitative methods were used to measure perceived service quality and brand loyalty using questionnaires. Statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were conducted to evaluate the data. The findings reveal that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived service quality and brand loyalty. Specifically, higher perceived service quality increases customer satisfaction, which in turn improves brand loyalty. The results emphasize the importance for hotel management to focus on improving service quality to ensure stronger customer loyalty. This study contributes to the literature by providing insights into the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty in the context of the luxury hotel industry in Istanbul and offers practical implications for hotel managers aiming to increase customer retention and loyalty.

ÖZET

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Algılanan Hizmet Kalitesi,
Marka Sadakati,
Turizm Sektörü,
5 Yıldızlı Oteller,
Müşteri Memnuniyeti

Jel Kodları:

L15, M31, M30, M00

Bu çalışma, turizm sektöründe 5 yıldızlı otellerde konaklayan misafirlerin algıladıkları hizmet kalitesine dayalı olarak marka sadakatine yönelik tutumlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Örneklem, İstanbul'da bir 5 yıldızlı otelde konaklayan 204 erkek ve kadın katılımcıdan oluşmaktadır. Çalışma, algılanan hizmet kalitesinin boyutları olan fiziki unsurlar, güvenilirlik, yanıt verebilirlik, güvence ve empati unsurlarının otel misafirleri arasındaki marka sadakatini nasıl etkilediğini değerlendirmektedir. Anketler kullanılarak algılanan hizmet kalitesi ve marka sadakati ölçülmüş ve nicel yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde betimleyici istatistikler, keşifsel faktör analizi ve yapısal eşitlik modellemesi gibi istatistiksel analizler yapılmıştır. Bulgular, algılanan hizmet kalitesi ile marka sadakati arasında anlamlı bir pozitif korelasyon olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle, daha yüksek algılanan hizmet kalitesi müşteri memnuniyetini artırmakta ve bu da marka sadakatini geliştirmektedir. Sonuçlar, otel yönetimlerinin müşteri sadakatini güçlendirmek için hizmet kalitesini iyileştirmeye odaklanmasının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, İstanbul'daki lüks otelcilik sektöründe hizmet kalitesi ile marka sadakati arasındaki ilişkiye dair literatüre katkı sağlamak ve otel yöneticilerine müşteri bağlılığını ve sadakatini artırmaya yönelik pratik öneriler sunmaktadır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Services are a set of values, usually intangible, offered to consumers and constitute an important part of economic activities. They are produced and delivered by individuals or organizations to meet customer needs. Services, unlike physical goods, cannot be stored and are often produced at the time of consumption, making them unique in terms of quality assessment. Perceived service quality is the process by which customers evaluate the extent to which a service meets their expectations. This concept is based on customers' experiences with, expectations of and perceived benefits from the service. Service quality is more difficult to measure than tangible products because subjective judgments and individual expectations play a major role.

Loyalty refers to the tendency of individuals to show a continuous commitment to a particular brand, product or service. This tendency manifests itself as repeatedly preferring the same brand, not switching brands and giving positive recommendations. Brand loyalty, on the other hand, is the continuity of consumers' tendency to repurchase and positively recommend a brand. This concept is not only limited to repurchase behaviors, but also includes consumers' commitment to a brand and their intention to prefer that brand.

The relationship between perceived service quality and brand loyalty has been extensively studied in the academic literature and there are many studies showing a strong link between these two concepts. High perceived service quality increases customer satisfaction, which in turn strengthens brand loyalty. When customers experience service quality that exceeds their expectations, they have experiences that reinforce their loyalty and increase their commitment to the brand. On the other hand, low service quality negatively affects customer satisfaction and thus brand loyalty. Therefore, businesses need to pay special attention to service quality in order to gain a competitive advantage and achieve sustainable success in the market. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that beyond perceived service quality, customers' emotional ties and personal relationships with the brand are also important in the process of creating loyalty.

This study aims to evaluate the relationship between perceived service quality and brand loyalty through the example of five-star hotels operating in the tourism sector. The increasingly settled view of researchers is that customer experience is generated through a longer process of company–customer interaction across multiple channels, and is generated through both functional and emotional clues. Research with practitioners indicates that most firms use customer satisfaction, or its derivative the Net Promoter Score, to assess their customers' experiences (Klaus & Maklan: 2013).

2. PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

Service is a concept that is defined in many different ways. In the literature, there is no consensus on a specific definition of service and this situation reveals that there are different definitions of the concept of service. In general terms, service is accepted as "a set of non-material activities that respond to needs" (Sariyer, 1996: 2). In another definition, service is defined as "abstract efforts that can be determined in a way to meet the demands of the consumer as the main goal or factor of any activity" (Üner, 1994: 3).

Service is an abstract product that transfers value to the buyer upon its production (Konya, 1998: 78) and the most distinctive feature of the service concept is that it is abstract. However, service is a concept that emerged due to the needs of people. The economic fulfillment of people's needs necessitates the existence of a service. In other words, where there is an economic need, there is a service. In order to fully understand the concept of service, the characteristics of service should be known (Erkut, 1995).

Service has been defined in various ways in the historical process. Davis and Goetsch defined service as "doing work for someone else" and according to Dibb, it refers to the abstract products produced by humans and machines (Koçbek, 2005: 23). Based on these definitions, it is possible to say that service is a set of abstract activities that are offered for sale at a certain price to meet the needs of individuals or groups, cannot be standardized, and provide satisfaction and benefit (Sevimli, 2006: 2).

Society's quality expectations are rising continuously due to factors such as globalization, increasing and difficult competition conditions, intense public control, increasing economic freedom and education level. These changes in customers' perception of service and quality cause the quality level of the services provided in the service sector to become more important. What is expressed by service quality is the extent to which the needs of the consumer can be satisfied based on the relationship between the sector providing the service and the person who is the recipient of the service (Bakan et al., 2011: 3). Service quality is the feeling that the service creates in the person

who buys it and shows the degree of satisfaction of the buyer. The way quality is perceived by customers is very important for service businesses. For this reason, the concept of service can also be defined as the qualities that the service should have in line with the expectations and needs of the buyer and the degree to which the service offered has these qualities (Çiçek & Doğan, 2009: 203).

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's definition, service quality is the indicator of the harmony of customers' perceptions of the performance in service delivery and their expectations from the service. In cases where the quality perception of the sector providing the service and the customer who is the recipient of the service are similar, disagreements and incompatibilities are minimized. The customer evaluates the service according to his/her own perception of quality. Accordingly, if the customer obtains the performance he/she expects from the service he/she receives, he/she will consider the service as "high quality", and if the service he/she receives is below his/her expectations, he/she will consider the service as "poor quality". For this reason, it is very important to analyze the quality perception of the customer base in the service sector in order to determine the level of service to be provided. Vincet K. Omachonu defines quality in health services from a synthesizing perspective with its technical and artistic aspects. This approach argues that quality in healthcare is determined by the art of treatment and technical quality. While compliance with scientific norms and standards refers to technical quality, responding to customer requests and expectations refers to the art of treatment (Kavuncubaşı, 2000: 270).

Perceived quality is defined as an attitude formed as a result of the comparison of customer expectations and service performance (Kang, 2006: 8). Customers have certain expectations about a service before using it. After using the service, customers perform an evaluation process by comparing their expectations with the realization of the service they have received. If the service quality perceived by the customer does not adequately meet the expected level of quality, the customer feels dissatisfied. On the contrary, if the service quality meets or exceeds the customer's expectations, the customer experiences satisfaction (Dalgıç, 2013; Uzunçakmak, 2021). Perceived service quality emerges as a result of customer expectations and experiences. When customer expectations are not met, perceived service quality is generally considered low, even if the experienced service quality is measured objectively (Grönroos, 2015: 98). Fundamentally, customer satisfaction depends on the perceived level of quality. A consumer with positive perceptions of service quality will be more inclined to report higher levels of satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005; Pappu & Quester, 2006; de Barros & Gonçalves, 2009).

3. BRAND LOYALTY

The concept of brand loyalty refers to the degree of passion and commitment of users towards a brand. Brand loyalty is of critical importance for companies. David Aaker emphasizes that thanks to brand loyalty, budgets allocated to marketing activities can be reduced, new customers can be acquired more easily and commercial gains can be increased (Devrani Korkmaz, 2009: 408). Brand loyalty enhances the predictability of sales and revenue by establishing a stable base of loyal customers. If a brand does not have a loyal customer base, it weakens its defenses in the market and only offers the possibility of building a potential loyal customer base. Brand loyalty provides a distinct advantage in the effective use of marketing resources. Maintaining an existing customer base is far more cost-effective than spending on new customer acquisition. A common mistake companies make is to ignore existing customers and focus solely on acquiring new ones. Customer loyalty creates a barrier to entry for competitors and it is costly to switch a customer from one brand to another (Aaker, 2009: 35; Devrani Korkmaz, 2009: 408). Aaker defines brand loyalty as an indicator of consistency in a person's tendency to repurchase a particular brand. According to Oliver, brand loyalty is the user's tendency to choose the same brand again, despite all situational factors and marketing efforts of rival brands. According to Palumbo and Herbig, brand loyalty is the tendency of users to choose a particular brand again despite lower price policies and promotional activities of competitors (Çilingir & Yıldız, 2010: 82). The concept of brand loyalty is particularly important in fast-moving consumer goods and packaged goods. Research shows that users can be loyal to more than one brand in fast moving consumer goods. This refers to the fact that consumers choose among more than one brand that they find acceptable and prefer. There have been many studies on the definition and measurement of brand loyalty. The generally accepted definition by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) explains brand loyalty as a prejudiced/qualified, behavioral response, continuous over time, as a result of decision-making processes, as a choice between multiple alternatives. As a result of the decision-making and evaluation process, users develop a commitment to the brand to which they are loyal. Brand loyalty refers to a commitment to a brand, as opposed to a tendency to repurchase. Dick and Basu (1994) define brand loyalty as "a behavioral response sustained consistently over time by a decision-making unit". Onkvisit & Shaw (1989) explain brand loyalty as a consistent preference after the act of purchase, expressed as attitudes and behaviors towards a brand. Hallberg (2004), on the other hand, defines

consumer loyalty as the act of repeatedly preferring and continuously purchasing the same brand by establishing an emotional bond with the brand. In particular, experiential service brands are of interest that are characterised by higher levels of employee contact, customisation directed toward people, and with a strong people orientation (Ismail et al., 2011). While some authors claim that it affects brand loyalty directly, others have found that it is a dependent variable, which, alone does not have any immediate effect on brand loyalty (Maheshwari & Lodorfos: 2014a).

4. THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY ON BRAND LOYALTY

In both developed and developing economies, the growth rate of the service sector is increasing and this sector represents a significant portion of the global domestic product; in fact, it is known that this sector accounts for approximately two-thirds of the global domestic product. The competitive conditions triggered by the globalization process and the increasing importance of services in parallel with economic and industrial developments require businesses to provide high quality services in order to survive (Koparal, 1997: 324; Okumuş & Duygun, 2008: 20). In recent years, the rapid evolution of the service sector and the intensification of competition in expanding markets have increased the sensitivity and awareness of the society towards quality, which has led service businesses to give more importance to quality. Service quality perceived by customers is a critical factor impacting brand loyalty in the service sector (Zeithaml et al., 1996: 33; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000: 73). According to the study conducted by Zeithaml et al. (1996), perceived service quality directly affects brand loyalty, while Taylor & Baker (1994) stated that this effect can also occur indirectly, especially customer satisfaction plays an important mediating role in this process (Taylor & Baker, 1994: 174-176; Brady et al., 2002: 27). Expectations are prominent in perceived quality; what consumers expect from a five-star hotel in terms of service quality differs from what they expect from a simple guesthouse. Just as the concepts of good and beautiful are relative, the concept of perceived quality is also relative (Erdoğan, 2014: 22).

In competitive environments, perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty are recognized as key elements of success for both manufacturers and service providers (Wang et al., 2004: 325). Cronin & Taylor (1992: 55) found positive causal relationships between customer satisfaction and service quality in the banking and fast food sectors. In their study on the travel behavior of university students, Gallarza & Saura (2006: 437) revealed that perceived service quality is an important factor affecting consumer behavior. The study conducted by Price et al. (1995) in the tourism industry indicated that there is a positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction and that if this relationship is repeated, the link between satisfaction and loyalty will be strengthened.

Perceived service quality is a relative concept that can vary depending on individual experiences and expectations. Studies by Nguyen & Leblanc (1998), Bloemer et al. (1999), and Snoj et al. (2004) have shown that perceived service quality can have an impact on loyalty through satisfaction as well as directly on loyalty. Customers' positive and negative perceptions of products or services affect their level of satisfaction. In order to ensure customer loyalty, it is important to understand customers' satisfaction with products or services and the perceptions that affect this satisfaction (Yılmaz & Çatalbaş, 2007: 85). Nadiri & Tümer (2007: 304) stated that high quality perception will have a positive effect on customers' future recommendation and behavior intentions.

Tangible elements encompass the concrete characteristics and amenities of a service environment, including the visual appearance of equipment, facilities, staff, and communication materials. By providing a visible feature that customers can readily evaluate, these factors enhance the customer's view of the total service quality. The tangible dimension, as identified by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry (1988), plays a crucial role in guiding clients to develop expectations about the service, particularly during the pre-purchase phase. Recent research has underscored the importance of tangible factors in influencing customer views, especially in industries where the physical environment is a major component of the service experience (Chua et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021). Specifically, in the hotel sector, the level of cleanliness in rooms, the professional demeanor of staff, and the layout of the lobby play a crucial role in determining the overall happiness of guests (Ali et al., 2022). Reliability was defined as the service provider's capacity to consistently and precisely deliver the promised service. It is widely recognized that this dimension is a key determinant of customer satisfaction, since it directly affects the reliability and credibility of the service provider (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The concept of reliability encompasses elements such as punctual delivery of services, adherence to commitments, and the preservation of accurate records. Contemporary studies have demonstrated that dependability continues to be a crucial factor in determining the quality of service in several sectors, such as healthcare, banking, and telecommunications (Lee et

al., 2017; An et al., 2019). Deploying a consistent and dependable service delivery system cultivates consumer confidence, resulting in increased customer loyalty and favorable word-of-mouth (Bolton & Mattila, 2015). Explicit enthusiasm indicates the level of preparedness and eagerness of the service staff to assist clients and deliver timely services. Although excitement is sometimes used interchangeably with responsiveness, it has been recognized as a separate factor that influences consumers' evaluation of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The presence of enthusiastic personnel exudes a palpable vitality and optimism, therefore augmenting the whole client experience. Kumar & Shah (2018) argue that employees who actively demonstrate enthusiasm not only enhance their ability to meet client demands more efficiently but also establish an emotional bond with the consumer, which is crucial for cultivating loyalty. The level of enthusiasm shown by employees in service sectors such as hospitality and retail has been shown to have a substantial influence on customer satisfaction and their likelihood to experience repeat business (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2017; Chiang & Wu, 2020). Trust, within the SERVQUAL paradigm, pertains to the service provider's capacity to instill confidence and give clients with assurance regarding the dependability and safety of the service. This dimension encompasses elements like as proficiency, politeness, and safety, guaranteeing that clients experience a sense of security in their engagements with the service provider. Parasuraman et al. (1988) recognized trust as a pivotal element in the establishment of enduring client relationships, particularly in services characterized by significant levels of risk, such as financial services or healthcare. Recent studies have emphasized the significance of trust in establishing robust customer connections, especially in the digital age, when customers are growing more preoccupied with the protection of their data and privacy (Crosby & Johnson, 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2021). Establishing trust through open and honest communication and maintaining high standards of quality has been shown to greatly improve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ranaweera & Sigala, 2015). Empathy encompasses the level of concern and personalized involvement that the service provider extends to its clients. It encompasses comprehending the particular requirements of clients, giving accessible assistance, and delivering tailored services. Effective empathy is essential for establishing a customer-centric culture in service organisations (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Previous research has indicated that when service providers exhibit empathy, clients are more inclined to perceive themselves as being appreciated and comprehended, resulting in increased levels of pleasure and loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Lee & Hyun, 2016). Within the healthcare and education industries, empathy has been recognized as a crucial indicator of favorable experiences for patients and students (Mercer & Reynolds, 2002; Ali & Raza, 2017). As a result, studies show that loyalty increases with increasing service quality, which leads to a decrease in the tendency to switch and complain (Parasuraman et al., 1996: 42).

5. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire-based survey was employed in the study to gather data from participants. The SERVPERF scale, created by Cronin & Taylor (1994), was used to construct the questionnaire for assessing individuals' perception of service quality. The selection of the SERVPERF scale was based on its ability to directly assess the performance as viewed by the customer, as opposed to the SERVQUAL model which estimates the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions. Furthermore, the survey included items pertaining to recommendation intents and repurchase behavior to evaluate brand loyalty, based on the scale developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996). The survey had elements that corresponded to the five fundamental aspects of perceived service quality: Tangible Elements, Reliability, Enthusiasm, Trust, and Empathy. All items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, which included responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This facilitated participants in articulating their degree of agreement with different statements pertaining to their experiences and views on service quality and brand loyalty.

The survey focused on clientele residing in luxury hotels with a five-star rating in Istanbul. A sample size of 204 individuals was established, including both male and female attendees. In order to guarantee a sample that accurately represents the population, participants were chosen based on their recent accommodation in a luxury hotel. The sampling technique employed was purposeful and convenient, specifically targeting visitors who had recently encountered the service quality of luxury hotels. This selection was made to ensure that the potential influence of perceived service quality on brand loyalty could be effectively evaluated.

In order to have a thorough picture of the sample, demographic factors including age, gender, marital status, education level, income, and employment position were documented. Prospective participants were approached and requested to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The acquired data were further examined using a range of statistical techniques, including as descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling, in order to assess the correlation between perceived service quality and brand loyalty.

This study was evaluated at the Ethics Committee meeting of İstanbul Nişantaşı University, on 07.03.2024, with the number 2024/03, and it was unanimously decided that the study complies with ethical standards. The decision number is 20240307/15.

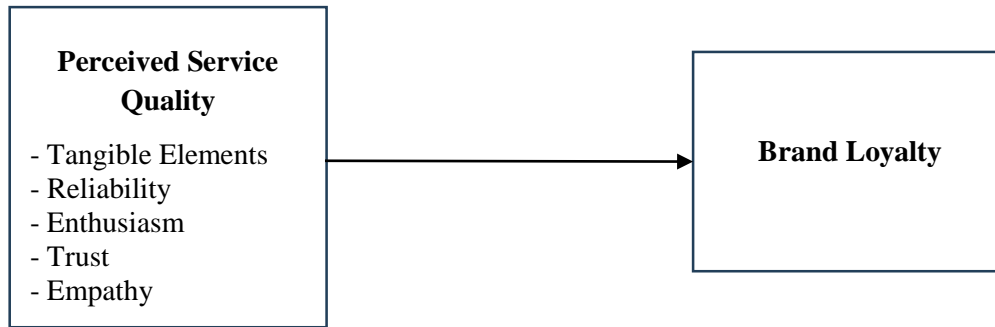


Figure 1. The Model of the Study

The hypotheses were formed as follows:

H₁: Perceived service quality has an impact on brand loyalty.

H_{1a}: Perceived quality of tangible elements has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H_{1b}: Reliability of service has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H_{1c}: Staff's enthusiasm in service delivery has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H_{1d}: The reassurance capacity of service providers has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H_{1e}: Service providers' capacity to show empathy has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

SPSS 24.0 program was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical methods, explanatory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used to evaluate the study data. Structural equation modelling was used for effect analysis. Significance was evaluated at $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$ levels.

5.1. Distribution of Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 provides a detailed analysis results of the participants' demographic characteristics and hotel stay experiences. As shown in Table 1, data on participants' gender, age, marital status, education level, income, employment status, reasons for hotel stays, frequency of stays at the same hotel, and stays at other hotels are analyzed. Of the participants, 52% (n=106) were female and 48% (n=98) were male. In terms of age distribution, 14.7% (n=30) were between the ages of 18-28, 31.9% (n=65) were between the ages of 29-38, 34.9% (n=71) were between the ages of 39-48 and 18.6% (n=38) were 49 years and older. In terms of marital status, 53.9% (n=110) of the participants were single and 46.1% (n=94) were married. In terms of educational level, 21.7% (n=44) were high school graduates, 14.2% (n=29) were associate degree graduates, 51.5% (n=105) were bachelor's degree graduates and 12.7% (n=26) were postgraduate graduates. According to income level, 14.7% (n=30) had an income of 17,002-25,000 TL, 12.3% (n=25) 25,001-35,000 TL, 13.7% (n=28) 35,001-45,000 TL, 22.8% (n=47) 45,001-55,000 TL and 36.8% (n=75) 55,001 TL and above. According to the organization, 30.4% (n=62) were self-employed and 54.9% (n=112) worked in the private sector. According to the purpose of hotel stay, 80.4% (n=164) stayed for vacation and 19.6% (n=40) for business purposes. According to the length of previous stay in the same hotel, 28.8% (n=58) had never stayed, 48.5% (n=98) had stayed 1-3 times, and 22.5% (n=46) had stayed more than 3 times. According to the length of stay in another hotel, 41.2% (n=83) stayed 1-3 times, 53.4% (n=107) more than 3 times and 5.4% (n=11) never.

Table 1. Demographic Information

		n	%
Age	18-28	30	14,7
	29-38	65	31,9
	39-48	71	34,8
	49 and above	38	18,6
Gender	Male	98	48,0
	Woman	106	52,0

Marital status	Single	110	53,9
	Married	94	46,1
Education Status	Bachelor's Degree	105	51,5
	Graduate Graduate	26	12,7
	High School Graduate	44	21,6
	Associate Degree Graduate	29	14,2
Income Level	17,002-25,000 TL	30	14,7
	25,001- 35,000 TL	25	12,3
	35,001-45,000 TL	28	13,7
	45,001-55,000 TL	46	22,5
	55,001 TL and above	75	36,8
Employed Institution	Public	30	14,7
	Own Business	62	30,4
	Special	112	54,9
Purpose of Hotel Accommodation	Work	40	19,6
	Holiday	164	80,4
Previous stay in the same hotel	1-3 times	100	49,0
	3-above	46	22,5
	Nothing	58	28,4
Duration of Stay at Another Hotel	1-3 times	84	41,2
	3-above	109	53,4
	Nothing	11	5,4

5.2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) adequacy measure and Bartlett's Sphericity test were used to measure the applicability of the factor analysis. The closer the (KMO) measure is to 1, the more appropriate it is to perform factor analysis on the available data group (Živadinović; 2004). In the analysis, it was calculated as 0.835 in the brand loyalty scale and 0.947 in the perceived service quality scale. As a result of the data obtained, it was deemed appropriate to analyze the data group.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test Results of Perceived Service Quality and Brand Loyalty Scales

	Brand Loyalty Scale	Perceived Service Quality Scale
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0,835	0,947
Chi-Square	1340,499	3341,658
Df	15	231
Sig.	<0.000	<0.000
Explained Variance Ratio	89,340	72,589

According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the total variance explanation rate of the brand loyalty scale was calculated as 89.340% and the total variance explanation rate of the perceived service quality scale was calculated as 72.589%. It is accepted that the larger the variance ratios obtained as a result of the analysis, the stronger the factor structure is and that it is sufficient for this value to be between 40% and 60% in social areas (Karagöz, 2017). In order to be able to say that an item measures a construct or factor well, the value of this factor loading is expected to be 0.30 or higher (Stevens, 2002). The results of the research support these findings and all values were found within the range specified in the literature.

5.3. Normality Distributions and Cronbach Alpha Results

Skewness and kurtosis values are taken into account to decide whether a distribution shows a normal distribution. At this point, the cut-off points (limits) of kurtosis and skewness values should not be above 3 in absolute value for skewness and above 10 in absolute value for kurtosis (Kline, 2011). Since all values found in our study were within the specified limit ranges, they are suitable for normal distribution.

Cronbach Alpha values of the scales between 0.70 and 0.99 indicate that they are reliable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Since all the values found in our study are within the specified limit ranges, our scales are reliable.

Table 3. Scale Mean Scores, Normality Distributions and Cronbach's Alpha Values

	Avr+SS	Min-Max (Medyan)	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha
Tangible Elements	4,16±0,58	2,25-5 (4)	-0,346	-0,040	0,791
Reliability	4,19±0,58	2,8-5 (4)	0,000	-0,978	0,920
Enthusiasm	4,07±0,59	2,6-5 (4)	0,043	-0,681	0,867
Trust	4,16±0,55	2,5-5 (4)	0,118	-0,493	0,839
Empathy	3,96±0,64	2,5-5 (4)	0,041	-0,574	0,819
Total Perceived Service	4,11±0,52	2,83-5 (4)	0,204	-0,662	0,958
Recommending to Others	4±0,81	1-5 (4)	-0,974	1,867	0,938
Repurchase	4,2±0,61	1,67-5 (4)	-0,476	1,038	0,926
Total Brand Loyalty	4,1±0,66	1,33-5 (4)	-0,630	1,464	0,939

5.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to determine the construct validity of the scales used in the study and the fit values obtained are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Fit Values

Compliance Criteria	χ^2	P	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	NFI	CFI	NNFI
Total Perceived Service Scale	16,44	0,000	3,28	0,091	0,084	0,98	0,97	0,97
Brand Loyalty Scale	2874,90	0,000	4,77	0,096	0,077	0,93	0,95	0,95

Table 5. Compliance Index Criteria

Compliance Measures	Good Fit	Acceptable Compliance
χ^2/df	≤ 3	$\leq 4 - 5$
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.89 - 0.85
CFI	≥ 0.97	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	0.06 - 0.08
NFI	≥ 0.95	0.94 - 0.80

As a result of the analysis, RMSEA, SRMS, NFI, CFI and GFI measurements are within the fit values. Accordingly, it shows that the research data have an acceptable and good fit and that our confirmatory factor analysis is statistically significant and valid (Erkorkmaz et al. 2013). Figure 2 shows the standardised regression values and goodness of fit indices of the model related to the total perceived service scale.

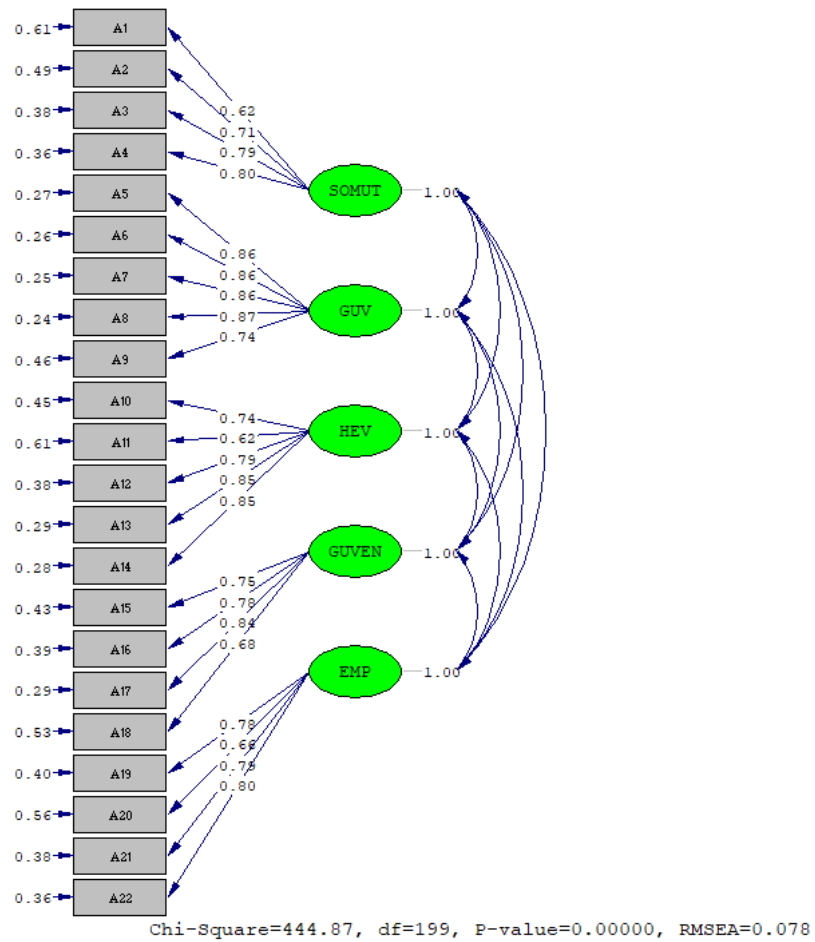


Figure 2. Total Perceived Service Scale Standardized Model Outputs

The goodness of fit index values obtained according to the model in Figure 1 are within acceptable limits ($\chi^2/df=2.23$, $RMSEA=0.078$, $p<0.05$). Standardised regression coefficients vary between 0.62 and 0.86. The model and the regression coefficients obtained are statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

Figure 3 shows the standardised regression values and goodness of fit indices of the model related to the brand loyalty scale.

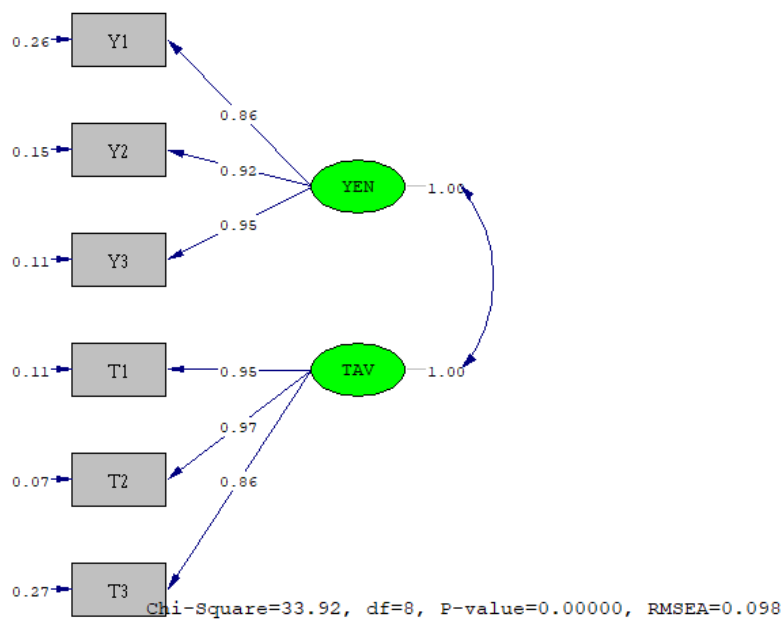


Figure 3. Brand Loyalty Scale Standardized Model Outputs

The goodness of fit index values obtained according to the model in Figure 2 are within acceptable limits ($\chi^2/df=4.24$, $RMSEA=0.098$, $p<0.05$). Standardised regression coefficients vary between 0.86 and 0.97. The model and the regression coefficients obtained are statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

5.5. Results of Hypothesis

Structural equation modeling was used to determine the effect of perceived service quality on brand loyalty. Our model outputs were found to be between acceptable fit and perfect fit. In addition to these criteria, if the $\{\chi^2 / df\}$ value is less than 3, it means that there is an acceptable fit. For this model, $\chi^2/df=1066.29/336=3.17$. This means that the model is statistically significant (Erkorkmaz et al. 2013). The goodness of fit values and limits for the structural model given in Figure 3 are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Structural Model Limits

Limits	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Model
RMSEA	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 < RMSEA \leq 0.10$	0.098
NFI	$0.95 \leq NFI \leq 1$	$0.90 < NFI < 0.95$	0.94
NNFI	$0.97 \leq NNFI \leq 1$	$0.95 \leq NNFI < 0.97$	0.95
CFI	$0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1$	$0.95 \leq CFI < 0.97$	0.95
SRMR	$0 \leq SRMR < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR < 0.10$	0.066

Figure 4 shows that Tangible has a positive effect on brand loyalty with a coefficient of 0.26. Reliability has a negative effect on brand loyalty with a coefficient of 0.18. Enthusiasm has a positive effect on brand loyalty with a coefficient of 0.03. Trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty with a coefficient of 0.51. Empathy has a positive effect on brand loyalty with a coefficient of 0.25.

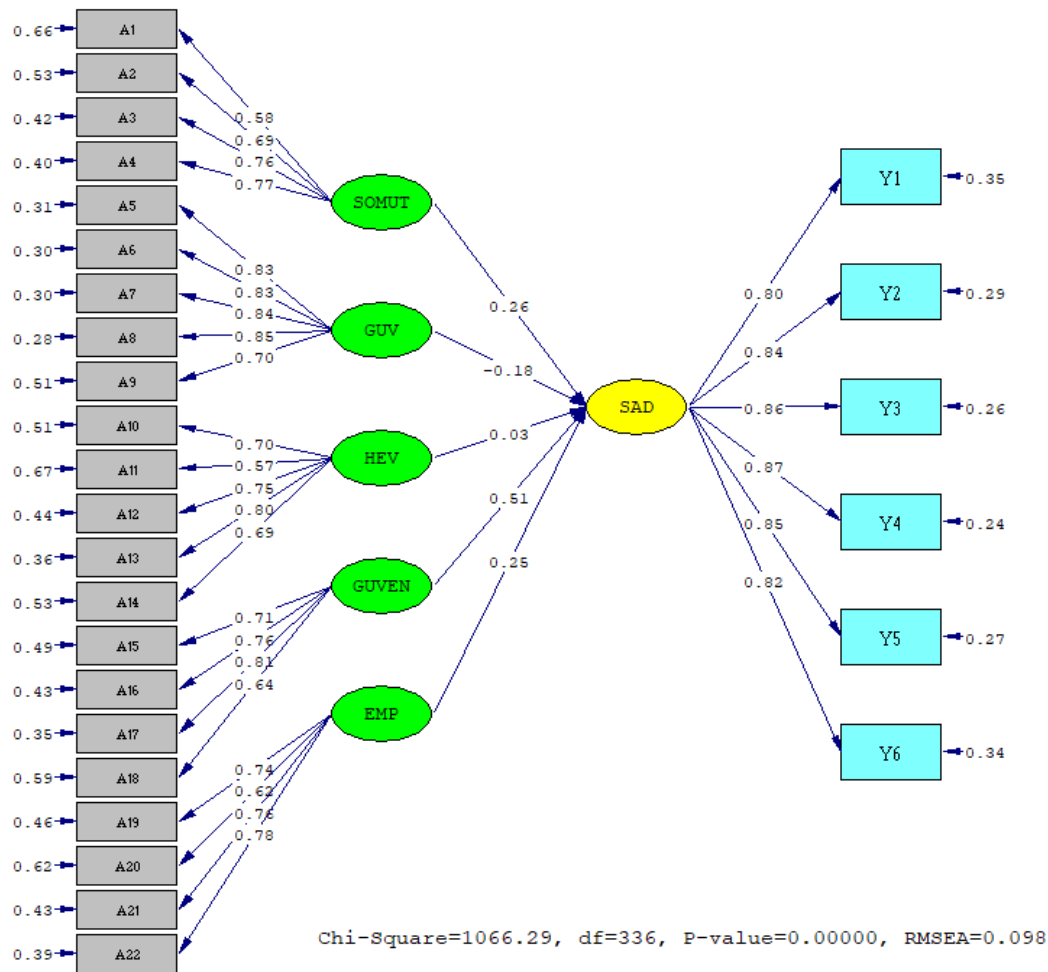


Figure 4. Structural Equation Model

Table 7. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Acceptance/ Rejection
H ₁ Perceived service quality has an impact on brand loyalty.	Accepted
H _{1a} Perceived quality of tangible elements has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Accepted
H _{1b} Reliability of service has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Rejected
H _{1c} Staff's enthusiasm in service delivery has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Accepted
H _{1d} The reassurance capacity of service providers has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Accepted
H _{1e} Service providers' capacity to show empathy has a positive effect on brand loyalty.	Accepted

As shown in the table based on the analysis, the reliability factor (H_{1b}) had a negative impact on brand loyalty, resulting in its rejection. Other hypotheses (H₁, H_{1a}, H_{1c}, H_{1d}, and H_{1e}) were accepted, indicating a positive effect of the respective factors on customer brand loyalty.

6. CONCLUSION

This research examined the effects of perceived service quality on brand loyalty and the findings revealed the important role of various dimensions of service quality on customer behavior. The analysis showed that the reliability factor has a negative impact on brand loyalty with -0.18. This emphasizes that the lack of consistent and reliable service has a negative impact on customer loyalty and how critical it is to meet customers' expectations of reliable service.

On the other hand, the factors of tangibility (0.26), enthusiasm (0.03), trust (0.51) and empathy (0.25) were found to have positive effects on brand loyalty. The embodiment shows that the physical elements of the service have an important place in customer perception and that the elements that make the quality of the service tangible increase customer loyalty. Enthusiasm indicates that the interest and enthusiasm shown by service personnel towards customers have a positive effect on loyalty. The trust factor reveals that customers' trust in the service provider is one of the strongest factors in increasing loyalty. Finally, empathy shows that understanding and being sensitive to customers' needs and emotions positively affects customer loyalty.

In our age, the similarity of products poses a serious problem. In this situation, it may be insufficient for businesses to rely solely on traditional marketing techniques or advertising strategies for their long-term success. If businesses want to achieve sustainable success, they need to approach the issue from a broader perspective. For this reason, businesses aiming to increase their competitive advantage by offering personalized customer experiences in order to get to know their customers and establish an emotional bond with them, apply various innovative marketing techniques. Brand experience, as an interactive and personalized marketing approach that symbolizes the products and services offered by the brand, meets people's emotional and psychological needs. In this context, consumers attach much more importance to the emotional and value-laden experiences offered by a brand than simply defining a brand by price or quality (Zhang, 2019: 556-557).

Recently, academics and marketing professionals have emphasized the critical importance of managing customer experiences in the value creation process (Berry et al., 2002; Iglesias et al., 2011). In this context, the marketing strategies of businesses represent a shift in focus from product attributes and quality to the quality, accuracy, and effectiveness of experiences (Klaus & Maklan, 2013). For businesses aiming to gain a competitive advantage in the market, clearly defining and developing the brand experience has gained great importance (Ismail et al., 2011; Maheshwari & Lodorfos, 2014b). Recent studies have further validated this focus, demonstrating that a well-designed customer experience significantly influences emotional attachment and brand loyalty, thereby driving customer retention and advocacy (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Khan et al., 2021). Especially in the service sector, the concept of experience has become an integral part of service delivery, and in this context, improving the experience and service quality is seen as one of the most important success factors in building customer loyalty. Service-dominant logic emphasizes that value is co-created with customers through their experiences, making the quality of these interactions crucial for fostering strong customer-brand relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019). Additionally, digital transformation in recent years has amplified the need for businesses to deliver seamless and engaging experiences across multiple touchpoints, further highlighting the role of customer experience in the contemporary marketplace (Bolton et al., 2018; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Geçen (2011) examined the effect of service quality on brand choice and customer loyalty in low-cost airlines. According to the results of the study, perceived service quality directly affects customer satisfaction. At the same time, passengers' satisfaction with their previous travel experiences was found to be linked to their likelihood of choosing the same airline in the future. This finding aligns with more recent studies that highlight the role of perceived service quality in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors in various service sectors, including aviation (Ali et al., 2022; Park et al., 2021). Erdoğan (2014) conducted a field study on the impact of brand equity on customer loyalty through the example of Starbucks. Quantitative analyses revealed that perceived quality increases customer loyalty, but brand awareness has no significant effect on this loyalty. The study also indicated that loyalty cards strengthen customer loyalty. Recent research has supported these conclusions, emphasizing that loyalty programs can enhance customer retention by offering tangible rewards, thereby creating an emotional connection with the brand (Kumar & Shah, 2020; Yang & Rahman, 2022). Furthermore, while brand awareness alone may not significantly drive loyalty, the combination of perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty programs has been shown to form a more holistic approach to cultivating long-term customer loyalty (Mende et al., 2019).

Karadeniz and Demirkan (2015) evaluated the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty in the retail sector in the case of Migros stores. The results showed that service quality reinforces brand loyalty. These findings are consistent with more recent research in the retail sector, which indicates that high service quality not only enhances customer satisfaction but also leads to increased trust and loyalty towards the brand (Hameed et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2020). Service quality has been identified as a critical factor in differentiating brands, especially in highly competitive markets, and it plays a vital role in fostering customer retention and advocacy (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2021). Kaya (2015) analyzed the relationship between brand loyalty, brand image, and perceived quality in the white goods sector. The findings revealed that perceived quality positively affects both brand image and brand loyalty, while brand image positively contributes to brand loyalty. This relationship has been further substantiated by recent studies, which suggest that a strong brand image can act as a mediator between perceived quality and customer loyalty, enhancing the overall customer experience and emotional attachment to the brand (Liu & Brock, 2019; Le & Shao, 2023). Moreover, perceived quality's influence on brand loyalty extends beyond functional aspects, encompassing emotional and symbolic associations that drive long-term customer commitment (Wang et al., 2022).

It has been observed that the results of the research and previous studies in the literature contain similar and compatible results. The findings reveal the existence of a significant and strong relationship between perceived service quality and brand loyalty. This relationship shows that consumers' loyalty to a brand is directly influenced by the quality of the services offered and that this quality increases customer satisfaction and reinforces loyalty. In this context, it is understood that service quality is a key factor that positively affects not only immediate customer satisfaction but also long-term customer loyalty. Therefore, for businesses, improving perceived service quality should be central to their customer relationship management strategies. These strategies are one of the basic building blocks for brands to gain a sustainable advantage in the competitive market. To summarize, the research once again confirms that the dynamic interaction between service quality and brand loyalty is a critical issue frequently emphasized in brand management literature.

The research results reveal that the perceived quality of service has a strong and direct impact on brand loyalty. It is observed that dimensions of service quality such as reliability, tangibility, enthusiasm, trust, and empathy shape customer behavior. While the inability to provide reliable service negatively affects loyalty, factors like trust, physical elements, and empathy strengthen it. These findings emphasize the critical role of improving service quality in customer relationship management strategies for businesses to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, offering personalized experiences that create emotional connections with customers and continuously enhancing service quality emerge as key elements in increasing brand loyalty.

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

This paper complies with Research and Publication Ethics, has no conflict of interest to declare, and has received no financial support. This study was evaluated at the Ethics Committee meeting of İstanbul Nişantaşı University, on 07.03.2024, with the number 2024/03, and it was unanimously decided that the study complies with ethical standards. The decision number is 20240307/15.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, writing-original draft, editing – **AÖ**, **BP** and **AE**, data collection, methodology, analysis – **BP** and **AÖ**, Final Approval and Accountability – **AÖ** and **AE**.

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